# FUORI

## ESSAYS BY
## ITALIAN/AMERICAN LESBIANS AND GAYS

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BORDIGHERA INCORPORATED
WEST LAFAYETTE, IN

Printed in the United States.

Published by
BORDIGHERA, INC.
Purdue University
1359 Stanley Coulter Hall
West Lafayette, IN 47907-1359

VIA FOLIOS 6
ISBN 1-884419-05-4

# NOTHING TO CONFESS:
# A LESBIAN IN ITALIAN AMERICA

MARY CAPPELLO



*"Please Bless Me Father . . ."*

Perhaps it makes the utmost sense that, in spite of all the practice and preparation, the anticipation and reiteration, I got my "First Confession" wrong. Initially there was the shock of misrecognition that marked my first entry into the confessional. Each time the nuns had addressed my third-grade class on the topic of the "confessional box," for example, I pictured the cozy-comfort of a life-sized cardboard box—the pulpy, confetti-filled refuge that was the refuse from a lately purchased family appliance, and that I would invariably shrink to enter, to play, dream, and sleep in. The priest, I imagined, would invite me to climb with him into one such box, a box that could fit two people comfortably. I would rest my head on his lap; he would rest his head on my back. At some point, we would talk.

I recall now my incomprehension before the "box" that I was told to enter—a too high-handled door, one of those very doors upon which my imagination had often fixed during mass as a child, the very doors beyond which I imagined the priests lived a life off-limits: in the large rooms behind these doors they wore costumes even more ornate than their garb on the altar; here they crossed their legs, they revelled, they smoked. How could the nuns now be prompting us to enter the priest's party palace? The place where only fathers and brothers were allowed? The rooms where priests became something other than themselves? Now I considered that once in the confessional I would see things that only adults could fathom but of which I was ever secretly aware. Instead, I was met by darkness—utter and total darkness, a trap, a blind fumbling for a kneeler, solitude. I knelt facing a barely discernible metal grate punctured with a pattern of holes—no doubt the lid of the "box" turned jar, with myself the writhing insect,

precisely caught. Or, now it was the uninviting surface of a beehive into which I whispered my hurried prayer, my secrets, my sins, my fear, each childish breath stroking the fury of the nesting bees, becoming their fur. As I uttered the last syllables of the closing prayer—"Oh my God I am heartily sorry for having offended thee"—I was interrupted by a whirring sound (like the opening of a jeweler's drawer) followed by the voice of a man saying, "Please bless me Father." I continued with my prayer—"Oh my God I am heartily sorry"—while he just as insistently and each time, a growing anger in his tone repeated, "Please Bless me Father." In a matter of seconds I interpreted his indirect directive (more an accusation than an explanation): I was to start over, begin at the top, since all the while I had told my first confession into the closed door within the closed door, and all the while he had been listening to another penitent on the other side of him who spoke into his right ear. No one had explained—or in my daydreaming had I missed it?—that you weren't to begin confessing until a whirring sound accompanied by particles of light let through the holes in the grate signaled that the priest had opened his ear-level portal to your voice. So, I told my first confession twice, and ultimately got my first confession wrong.

Having been asked to write about the way my sexuality—lesbian—intersects with my ethnicity—Italian/American—I find myself in more ways than one repeating my first confession, and in this case, once again, I both hope and expect to get it wrong. From where I stand, Italian/American subjectivity is complexly wed to Catholicism. Even though my mother—one of the people with whom I have most closely identified—eventually and boldly left the Church for the community of artists and poets, Catholicism still asserts itself as the bedrock, perhaps the major tableau vivant of my desiring; and, my sundry "identities," I believe, have been deeply, perhaps ineradicably interpellated by the meanings and rhythms of the prayers rehearsed in the confessional.

Since religious practice forms one of the crossroads where my ethnicity and sexuality meet, I will need to retread some of Catholicism's ground, but with an eye to the counter-narratives produced even there and that may have made possible the terms of an alternative desire. What kinds of bodies did my experience of Catholicism produce? Is there a continuum from the painful indentations left on knees to the way I was led to wonder about the bodies behind the nuns' habits to the nuns' own fascination with

and regulation of our bodies: when they weren't forcing my wildly curly hair into an Anglicized pony-tail, they were checking under my uniform for a slip or whacking the young backs of my legs with a ruler.

My point, at this early juncture, is that "sexuality" and "ethnicity" are neither stable terms nor sites whose contours can be apparently traced. "Sexuality" and "ethnicity" can have both everything and nothing to do with one another, just as they might only be truly mutually articulated through other discursive conditions like religious practice and class. As Stuart Hall has argued in the context of the search for "Black" in "Black Popular Culture," not only are we always "negotiating different kinds of difference—of gender, of sexuality, of class" . . . but "these antagonisms refuse to be neatly aligned; they are simply not reducible to one another; they refuse to coalesce around a single axis of differentiation. . . . They are often dislocating in relation to one another" (31). In fact, to retrieve or celebrate some myth of an essentialized Italian/American ethnicity might require the effacement of gay desire, and perhaps this is why I have made the choice to filter this set of reflections through a rhetorical mode—the confessional—rather than through some picture-perfect memory of a discernible Italian/American content as explanation for a sexual choice.

To discuss sexuality, moreover, to position oneself in terms of a presumed sexuality, especially when that sexuality is a prohibited one, is inevitably to participate in a discourse of disclosure, is to be reduced to the confessional mode. Feminist philosopher Judith Butler's theorizations, especially in "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," have been most helpful to me as I attempt to understand the profundity of this problem, its political ramifications, and its significance for the invention/maintenance of a subversive identity. Having reminded us that identity categories are often enough "instruments of regulatory regimes" (13) and that to "write or speak as a lesbian . . . is a production, usually in response to a request, to come out or write in the name of an identity which, once produced, sometimes functions as a politically efficacious phantasm" (13), Butler asserts her desire to "have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign [lesbian] signifies" (14). She goes on to formulate a series of instructively unsettling questions:

> What or who is it that is 'out,' made manifest and fully disclosed, when and if I reveal myself as lesbian? [. . .] What

> remains permanently concealed by the very linguistic act that offers up the promise of a transparent revelation of sexuality? (15) [. . .]
>
> If a sexuality is to be disclosed, what will be taken as the true determinant of its meaning: the phantasy structure, the act, the orifice, the gender, the anatomy? [. . .] Is it the *specificity* of a lesbian experience or lesbian desire or lesbian sexuality that lesbian theory needs to elucidate? Those efforts have only and always produced a set of contests and refusals which should by now make it clear that there is no necessarily common element among lesbians, except perhaps that we all know something about how homophobia works against women—although, even then, the language and the analysis we use will differ. (17)

In the pages that follow, I hope to, at the least, play with, and at most constructively resist/understand, the precepts of "confession" as they animate the narrative of being an Italian/American lesbian.

In some important way, perhaps, I never did enter the confessional in spite of its traumatic threat; the usurpation of "box" by "closet" was never wholly achieved. Thus I refuse to pretend to tell what Italian/American lesbian will signify in advance. And, I hope the collective project of which this writing is a part will do more than institutionalize a "carefully segregated visibility" of gay Italian/Americans.[1]

*"Please Bless Me Father . . . "*

This writing enters my dreams. In these scenarios the child, now a woman, has been made to feel the need for a father's blessing. She implores him. In one dream, I'm staying with my lover at my mother's place in Philadelphia [my parents are divorced]. We were expecting a visitor who didn't arrive, so we decide to go to bed. Once upstairs, I hear a knock at the door but am a little frightened to see who it is. I think it might be our friend B. I go down and look through the peep-hole but do not see anyone. I'm on my way upstairs when my father and an elderly Italian woman

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[1] In a talk that she delivered last year here at the University of Rhode Island (March 1, 1993), Michele Wallace framed her critique of feminist film theory's elision of black female spectatorship with a statement from Stuart Hall: ". . .what replaces invisibility is a kind of carefully regulated, segregated visibility" (Hall 26). That visibility is occluded by renewed forms of policing does not serve as an end point in the work of either Wallace or Hall. Rather, it necessitates more rigorous accounting of the ways in which identities are organized and dislocated; or the ways in which oppressions function within distinct historical configurations and representational regimes.

come through the door. The woman, my father explains, was/is the nanny of my Sicilian grandmother. She addresses me in Italian beginning with "como"? [*sic*] I figure out that she is asking me about what I am wearing and wants to know "why" I am wearing pajamas. Her tone is disapproving. I explain that I had gone to bed. She continues to question me in Italian until I tell her that I don't speak Italian: "non parlato [*sic*] italiano" is what I say. Meanwhile I am trying to get my hands on some of the specialty candies they have brought with them. I'm reaching in the bag for my favorite hard Sicilian candies with liquid fruit centers but feel the gaze of my father and my grandmother's nanny so settle for the chocolate pieces that are easier to get at. Just now my father is explaining to this woman that J. and I are lesbians. She is speaking English now and yet he says it in (what I imagine to be) Italian: "lesbienn." I'm wondering why in the world he is telling her this. I await her reaction. . . .

Perhaps this dream narrates, better than I ever could within the conscious confines of an essay, the ways in which internalized homophobia is structured in and through ethnicity. I am struck, for example, by the way the dream calls upon the Italian *language*—a language I do not consciously (nor apparently unconsciously) "know"—as the mark of ethnicity, and how that language enacts its own relation to enclosure (the closet?) (the confessional?) within the enclosed space (the bedroom?) of the dream.

"Italian," according to this dream, is the language I do not have access to and yet which provides the terms by which I will be named, accused, interrogated.

"Italian" is the essence that I fear betraying in the exposition of lesbian desire.

"Italian" is the route to the elders, who, the family assumes, are better off *not* knowing what they cannot understand about their third-generation Italian/American offspring. "Italian" is the language for that which cannot be directly expressed, just as, in waking life, my older relatives and my parents used Italian for all that they did not want my generation to hear, including "family secrets."

Is the lesbian in an Italian/American family the *embodiment* of the family secret? And, does my dream displace the negativity implicit in that position onto my Sicilian grandmother's nanny?—i.e., who ever knew that my grandmother, poor as she was, had a nanny? And who is this nanny who assumes I will understand her

language and who is privy to the deepest parts of my identity? Her question—"como"—that I incorrectly translate as "why" is a sign for the question asked by a parent who interprets the announcement of the child's sexual preference as an affront: as in, "*why* are you doing *this* to *me*?" Insofar as the question appears in the dream as "why are you wearing your pajamas?", it refers, I can be sure, to a favorite pair of purple flannels that I often have trouble exchanging for *real* clothes and that stand for a leisurely decadence that is all too rare in my daily life given the workaholic that I am. When grandmom's nanny asks, "why are you wearing your pajamas?", she is not only asking "why are you a lesbian?", but also "why aren't you *working*?" In this sense, the NANny is a NUN passing for the Catholic Church—the disciplinary structure that may have converted the pleasures of my Italian/American family (especially food and music, dance and a good deal of hugging) into signs of old country, peasant, non-capitalist depravity. In another sense, though, "NANny" conjoined with "FAther" translates as "Ninfa," which was my Sicilian grandmother's real name, meaning "nymph," and whose nickname was "Fanny." Perhaps there is some residual childhood embarrassment about the sexualized connotations of my grandmother's name, for it is she, after all, who provides the candy, she who provides the very pleasure that she then prohibits, she whose blessing must mean more to me than the blessing of my father.

*"for I have sinned . . . "*

The criminal (i.e., sinful) element of my dream and its exegesis is not to be found in the unspeakable desire that it is presumably about but, rather, in the way it reproduces a particular discursive imperative that one subject position oust, cancel out, negate the other. According to this model, "lesbian" and "Italian/American" cannot exist side by side; lesbian and Italian/American can only augur an antagonism that renders them mutually exclusive. However, such a model will persist only so long as we continue to treat ethnicity as a seamless, identifiable, and perfectly autonomous entity rather than as the fractured, multiple, and interdependent webwork of markings and practices that it is. Not only is it impossible to assume that Italian/American means the same thing for myself and other Italian Americans who address this subject, but a turning in the direction of my own experience of Italian/Americanness might reveal a set of paradoxes and multiplicities that

may have made an alternative sexuality more than viable—necessary and beautiful.

Returning to my dream, I realize that it brings both sides of my family (my mother's apartment/my father's visit) into the same space, but that, in reality, my paternal Sicilian and maternal Neapolitan and Compobassan forebears represented profoundly different versions of what it meant to be Italian in the United States: they could never reside comfortably under the same roof.

Giovanni Petracca was a shoemaker whose shoe repair shop was attached to his house; Giacomo Cappello was a sheet metal worker who travelled from home to work at the Philadelphia Naval Base each day. My Sicilian relatives lived in the tight-knit Italian enclave of row-homes known as "South Philly" while my maternal relatives lived in a staid suburb that my grandfather believed would grant his family a degree of protection. From the point of view of my child's eye, it was a matter of the difference between ice cream and water ice: in the Llanerch suburb, the local specialty was an orange-colored medicinal tasting one dip cone from the local Thornton Wilderish drugstore; in South Philly, every morsel of lemon ice was a deep and novel sensual pleasure, from the gritty, bitter surface of the rind that flavored the ice to the fluted dixie cups it was served in.

My Sicilian grandmother stood eternally before a pot of escarole and miniature-meatball soup, while grandmom Petracca served past' e fagioli. The Bottino/Cappellos baked their macaroni; the Arcaro/Petraccas never did. A typical Sicilian extended family meal had the quality of a binge and purge fest. There was a sense that my Sicilian relatives could not decide what they really wanted for dinner, so they made one of everything, then, having assaulted their stomachs with the chaos of their wants, threw up. Dinner at the Petraccas, on the other hand, was an occasion marked by humility and thankfulness; it had the bearing of a minimalist aesthetic colored by the care put into the meal. In place of an overstuffed *cannoli*, picture for dessert a pear, crudely sculpted, delicately peeled by my grandfather's penknife. Perhaps it is the difference between decadence and reverence that I am trying to describe—a reverence grotesquely approved and appropriated by the plastic crucifixes and numerous dime-store religious shrines that filled my Neapolitan grandparents' house, a decadence whose complex emotional confusions were too readily flattened into the

forms of tinsel-embossed mirrors, plastic seat covers, red velvet fleur de lis wallpaper for the Sicilians.

Sacredness and profanity, purity and indulgence: so the Catholicism that organized desire in these families might label the structures of feeling that I am trying to describe. What I would like to emphasize in place of a diametric opposition between these styles of Italian/American-ness is the sense that I have about both families—a sense that some unmet desire existed that was unsatisfyingly, maybe even violently forced into religious or materialist forms, but whose more appropriate medium would have been "queerness" in its broader sense. A love of opera (see the Petraccas) and an affinity for Kitsch (see the Cappellos) remind me of the avenues that, in their appropriated form, gay male desire has taken. But even in the Italian/American contexts within which I grew up—in the forms of expression themselves, or in what I venture to interpret as the desire that was brought to the American context but which America could not meet or articulate—was a degree of queerness.

I do not mean to deny the obviously patriarchal, homophobic traditions that characterize *Italian* culture per se. But I am wondering if the people who helped shape my identity and who emigrated from Italy faced an even more virulent strain of patriarchy in the United States, and if, in fact, their leaving had something to do with being outside the purview of the original patriarchal context as well. Now one might say that just for this reason, the Cappellos and Petraccas would have felt compelled to endorse more fully the sexist dictums I have in mind. What I could never fail to notice about the men and women in my Italian/American family, though, was somewhat different: the men failed miserably and with varying degrees of unhappiness in conforming to the mask of white, middle-class masculinity, and the women wielded word, story, their own bodies, in ways that could never pass for demure. By Anglo-American standards, to put it crudely, the male members of my family were soft and the females were hard. Mightn't the fraternal demolition parties that Hollywood cinema has invented for Italian/American subjectivity be indicative of precisely a fear that those dark, curly-haired, music-loving, flower-tending Italian/Americans are queer?

However well I try to place it, "my lesbianism" insists on returning to the unarticulated space between my maternal and paternal legacies. Rather than having emerged, in true Oedipal fash-

ion, out of an identification with one parent and disavowal of the other, my willingness to inhabit a space of transgressive pleasure found its impetus in the unresolved area of desire/lack that was the space between Anglo ideals and Italian realities. In "becoming queer," I was becoming what my Italian/American forebears denied about themselves even as they provided the example. In becoming queer, I see myself as having made something wonderful out of an Italian/American fabric, the Italian/American weavers of which were too ready and willing to discard.

For the lesbian in me is the grandmother who as a child jumped rope with such intense and rapid, with such forceful pleasure that her mother was driven to threaten her with stories of "the little girl who died from jumping rope"; she is the grandmother who made the mistake of singing in the Catholic schoolroom "Holy Roller" songs that she learned on North Philadelphian street corners—songs with titles like "Sail On," and "Brighten the Corner Where You Are"; she is the mother who was ostracized from the local town meetings for speaking out against racism and who fought the church fathers with poetry; she is the daily bliss of generations of these mothers combing their daughters' curls; she's great uncle "Diamond" who never left his mother, her grocery store, but who, during lent, amidst the abstaining stench of codfish soaking in their wooden barrels, manufactured ecstasy—my first pineapple sundae; she's great aunt Mary whom the family refused to see for many years because she married a Black man (I remember studying a photo of Aunt Mary in which she sits on the floor and draws one knee playfully up to her chest; she's wearing short hair and pants); she's her father before he got married, gallivanting with his gay friend, Armand; she's the love the father could not express toward Armand and so he made Armand the godfather of his first son and then beat the son repeatedly; she's the grandfather who taught her, the smallest and a girl, to play duets with him on mandolin; she's the grandfather who guided viny tendrils, then roamed his garden in silence; she's the aunt who entered the convent without giving up the world. When Sister B. brought home a secular girlfriend, the family said nothing about their holding hands at the dinner table, nothing about the girlfriend bestowing the aunt with lavish gifts; but when Sister B's real sister died, they—the alcoholic Anglo, in-law husbands being most vehement on this score—denied her girl-

friend the privilege of viewing the corpse. I remember seeing the girlfriend, whose toughness I enjoyed, weeping.

*"It has been twenty years since my last confession, and these are my sins . . . "*

In 1979, away from home for the first time as a freshman in college, I dealt with the fears of an emerging extra-familial identity by tape-recording an oral history from my maternal grandmother, Rose Arcaro. It was summertime between semesters. I was working as a bank teller by day, and I looked forward to the evenings when my grandmother would join us for dinner followed by a tape-recording session at the dining room table. Our quarters were cramped, so my grandmother's voice is accompanied in the recordings by the clanking sounds of my mother's work in the kitchen and the strange basal tones of other voices from the television that my father watched in the next room. Somehow it was important to me to eke out a space for remembering the correct order of births among my great aunts and uncles; the seemingly insignificant cathections of my grandmother to her own childhood—those pieces of the past she served up with pleasure and tears again and again; the mad songs she loved to sing; the excessiveness of her laughter; and the daily stories that her mother-in-law, Giuseppina Conte, told her in those rare free moments from the familial duties they performed together under the same roof. One such story was supposed to have taken three days to tell, but my grandmother was forced to compress its details: each night the volume from the television set got louder and each night my father suggested taking my grandmother home earlier. Perhaps if I had asked my father to speak a few words into the machine, I would have gotten the three-day long story in its appropriately drawn-out form. As it is, I have a shortened version that can serve my exploration of confession's contours only too well.

The story was about a Saint Nevius who had committed unspeakable crimes. Nevius' crimes were so appalling—he had, for example, "dishonored families"—that no priest would give him absolution. Nevius, in turn, making the rounds of the local churches, killed each unforgiving priest. One day, however, he entered a monastery where he met a "would-be priest," who, unlike the ordained monks, was willing to take Nevius on. This unordained sexton donned a monk's garb and "pretended" to hear Nevius' confession. He admitted to having committed equally

atrocious crimes himself, and he eventually gave to Nevius a pseudo-holy communion in the form of a slice of lemon. For weeks he trained Nevius on the bitter taste of this fake communion until Nevius became so pious that he was deemed ready to receive real communion. Now the near-monk confidante who had, according to my grandmother, "penetrated into Nevius' mind," decided he must leave the monastery for fear that Nevius would learn of his non-priestly status and kill him. When he tells Nevius that he must leave for "another mission," Nevius weeps: he tells him that he was the only man among them who liked him, and he resolves to join the monastery himself. Now came the part of the story that I anticipated most, the very reason for listening to this story: the monks, still distrusting the criminal, gave Nevius the smallest room, no, a closet, to live in; when they brought him his meals, they noticed he refused to eat them. One day, he offered to help in the garden, but his secret reason for doing so (enter my favorite part) was so that he could gather stones and nails to make up the mattress of his self-torture. Years of self-abnegation failed to convince the monks of the fitness of Nevius' soul, so that when he died, they buried him in the wine cellar (on the same day, the evil bishop had died, but they buried him in the crypt of the church). After a few days of the usual monasterial fare of daily mass, one of the monks noticed that the barrel of communion wine was never empty, indeed, the entire cellar was suddenly flooded with wine. "That was the miracle," my grandmother would say. Nevius' body was intact and the wine issued from grapes that grew from vines that emerged from a grape seed lodged between his teeth! And then my grandmother would add, "you might not believe it, but this story was *true*. This was a true story."

The story was true enough for me: it compelled me to identify with it in confusing ways (I, too, it will be recalled enjoyed lemon rind); it held out complexities and uncanny images that, to this day, I still cannot decipher even if I can vividly picture the grape seed fruitfully rooted between the front teeth of Nevius' beatific face. There lies Nevius, I imagine, a plump and satiated monk, begging the other monks to partake in a bacchanalic feast . . . until I remember that Nevius was *not* the fat, unforgiving lawmaker, not the stereotyped monk, but the ascetic penitent who achieved grace outside the law. I continue, however, to want to mis-read Nevius as fat—how, after all, did the grape seed get there? My mother would answer that there were always stray grape seeds on

the floor of the cellar where they made the wine. I didn't buy it. Nevius must have been gorging himself on grapes while they thought he was starving; or, a grape seed found a place in Nevius' mouth because his front teeth were gapped—sure sign of his sexual indulgences. According to my reading, Nevius enjoyed sleeping on a bed of nails just as much as I enjoyed listening to the conscious care with which he gathered the materials of his painful pleasures.

My reading, it appears, wanted to retrieve the gay subtext of the tale of Saint Nevius: the story admits him through the back door—he is abject, he is other; it fancies a meeting between himself and a like-minded man, the only confessor willing to hear himself in Nevius' confession, the forgiving non-priest, and then transmutes the intimacy between the two men into the necessary sequestering of Nevius, the disappearance of his body and purification of his soul that makes possible the reappearance—the miraculous integrity and fecundity—of his body. In short, the story presumably honors Nevius for giving up his gayness. And yet the invalid confession as displaced site of male-male desire remains for me the central nerve of the tale. It persists as this story's mark, its difference. Nevius' crime, it will be recalled, is unforgivable and unintelligible within the confines of institutionalized confession. His confession, in some sense, cannot be "heard." If Nevius never experiences a "true" confession, how could he be absolved? The story, of course, would like to answer that forgiveness is not within the purview of humankind; or, because Nevius truly repented, he was truly forgiven by He who has the ultimate power to forgive—God will even take queers into his fold if they closet themselves and beg forgiveness. Marginalized people (in our culture, women, Blacks, gays) know better than anyone, however, that *we are* each other's judges and that confessional discourse structures our relationship to what we can desire, know, fear, and become. The miraculous feature of the story of Saint Nevius is its temporary allowance of a secular blessing, the illegitimate kiss that is Nevius and the sexton's mock confessional. Can the story of Saint Nevius reopen the door to my first, my invalid, confession, never heard for its ignorance of form? If never heard, never spoken? It has been twenty years since my last confession and these are my sins:

I let a woman who had been spared religious discipline open the envelope of my desire, then read my body through whole languorous, undying afternoons. My favorite English professor was an

Arab Sufist who, rather than order books for the class, told us to sit silently, then wait for a door to open. I entrusted my sorrow weekly to a Jewish psychoanalyst. I found my confirmation name in a cookbook rather than a Book of Saints. My friend Jennifer chose "Kristen"—name of the school whore; my friend Paula chose "Bernadette"—who had visions no one believed; I heard and saw the name "Catherine," and, in an instant like Proust's, was awash with a primal sensation: Catherine was the smell of vanilla extract used while baking cookies with my mother. Whenever I was alone, I worked rather than played with myself. I feared dwelling too long with Happiness—she might want me to wear her clothes. I translated my anger into an indecipherable language then buried it in a box marked EXPLOSIVES—DO NOT HANDLE OR OTHERWISE ATTEMPT TO IGNITE. I read Shakespeare rather than learn to speak Italian. I never forgave the nuns their belief in redemption through, not only self-inflicted, but other-directed, pain. Or the way they made us feel the unprotected nature of our bodies. I have trouble eating dinner if a particular ex-nun is at the table. I gave, I gave, without regard for my own appetite. I had to learn how to eat again like a drooling infant/"may I have one more bonbon please?" Though I knew I resembled Bougereau's nymph-like olive skinned beauties who never got old, who were innocence incarnate, I anticipated a monster in the mirror in place of my face. For a time, I judged others too harshly. For a time, I was unable to enter any room but those of my own making. I couldn't trust the bricklayer if I didn't mix the mortar. I contemplated burning the confessional to the ground, but I knew it was impervious to fire. I wrote this with the conscious intention of resisting the lure of lyricism, the sentimental story. Why wax romantic about an un-pretty picture? The anti-queer world. A world increasingly devoid of language capable of expressing a new thought. I secretly admired the ugliness of Gertrude Stein's prose. I wanted to make music but only so long as you didn't translate it into wash-worn forms. (At this point, Curly from the three stooges asks if I have a "poysecution" complex; Freud answers an "Italian/American ex-Catholic lesbian is being beaten," while blowing the smoke of his cigar into Curly's face. Curly and I perform an improvisatory dance together close to the floor, requiring nonsensical props.)

A corner of the room becomes an Autumn day. Turtles sun themselves on fallen branches. The river reflects nothing but turtles' slow breathing and the amber outlines of their glossy shells. Two